

BODY-DRAPING
USING COSTUME AND MOVEMENT AS CHOREOGRAPHIC TOOLS IN THE CREATIVE
PROCESS AND CHOREOGRAPHIC OUTCOMES

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Abstract

Costuming is an invaluable tool in visual communication and for setting the mood of the story for an audience. This extended essay is about using *costumes and movement as choreographic tools in the creative process and performance outcomes*. The development is used to deepen and support contemporary movement language through the use of fabric manipulation. For example, this process focuses on how to create movement from fabric, in order to create costuming that connects to the meaning of the movement. The process looks at how costuming brings out the physicality of the dancer's character.

The developments of choreography and movement invention in dance are discussed in this essay as a means of developing an extended movement vocabulary, which is exposed within three case studies in the contemporary choreography and dance dramaturgy curriculum, that are rooted in the African values as a way of deepening the expression of its society.

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Introduction

The three case studies discussed in this thesis, investigates how to deepen the support of contemporary movement language through use of fabric manipulation. These case studies research how movement can be created from costuming (fabric manipulation), how costuming is created to support the meaning of the movement; and how costuming can bring out the physicality of the dancer's character. The research question for all of these case studies is: *How can costuming support and deepen the contemporary choreographic voice and how might fabric manipulations take a central role in the creative process?*

The attempt of this research is to explore the power of costuming to tell deep and profound stories of life and history. Although the elements of lighting, performance space and music play an integral role in traditional hierarchies in preparing a performance in the theatre, costuming seems to be the last element to join the process. Yet costuming is a valuable tool in visual communication and in setting the mood of the story for the audience. Costuming educates the viewer by dramaturgically setting the historical context, and it strengthens the scenography of the performance in the framework of texture, color hues, and design. Costuming can un-earth the emotional attachment to history and deepen the personality development of the character. Costuming drives the human emotions of the artist and the viewer, and it informs the mover by challenging the physicality of the dancer, through a kinesthetic dialogue with it.

The interconnection of the costume design construction and dance world has been established for many years but mostly it takes the form of an afterthought or as a final quick touch to the dance. But the notion of costume as a choreographic design enhancement has been visible especially in early dance history, but not often an integral part of the choreographic process. Today, this way of creating is considered interdisciplinary or a crossbreed of the art, meaning that two forms with the same intentions communicate meaning in a performance.

Early dance masters used costuming as an extension of their choreographic vision. In the late 1800's when Loie Fuller used a flowing light silk to go along with her movements in the famous "*Danse Serpentine*." Alwin Nicolia's "*Allegory*" worked his costume to reshape the body and depersonalize the dancer's body. William Forsythe, with fashion designer Issey Miyake, created a fabric technique called "garment pleating" to allow costumes to move with the dancer. Designer Alexander McQueen, with Sylvie Guillem, Robert Lepage and Russell Maliphant collaborated in a work called "*Eonnagata*" *Connecting Fashion and Dance*. Maria Blaisse, examines the relationship of dancer and fabric form in who takes the lead in movement manipulation. Costume designer Francois Barbeau, designed for Cirque de Soleil in collaborated with the company choreographer to create shows such as *Dralion (2001)* and *Wintuk (2007)*. These artists have set the stage for the creation of a more interdisciplinary choreographic process that has continued a central to the investigation of a work.

This idea that has inspired me to research a choreographic approach that begins with costume, fabric, and textiles to generate a movement vocabulary. This movement vocabulary is developed in the three case studies, spring from my knowledge and research on African values and aesthetics.

In an interview with Professor Francis Nii Yartey, Head of the Department of Dance at the University of Ghana, Nii shares the philosophy of the African value of being in perpetual motion of life with no beginning and no end. The circular path of life is spiritual and is captured and embedded within the community, music, language, movement, performance art, and dance. The costumes are integral to the dances and stories of the past.

Esi Dogbe's *Unraveled Yarns: Dress, Consumption and Women's bodies in Ghanaian Culture* article talks about traditional women's dress called the Ntama in Ghana. Dogbe promotes the importance of the history that is attached to the dress, how it informs the superiority of African women and as a result, this reflects the consumption of cloth to make these outfits, cultural practices, cultural beliefs, fashion trends, and the value of the cloth.

In Elisha P. Renne's "*Cloth That Does Not Die*" *The meaning of cloth in Bunu social life*" there is an emphasis on the meaning of cloth and the symbols as it pertains to the social way of life. In the text, she notes our relationship with cloth and how the value of cloth is passed

through generations to symbolize identification.

In the E-book, “*About Being Able to Look Good in a Burlap Sack*” by Ida Tomshinsky, Ida talks about the history and the beauty of this natural fabric and the potential uses and misuse involved, aside from its’ use as a potato sack.

Artist Nick Cave, is considered a performance artist because of the diversity of media he explores. This artist (his famous *Sound-Suit*) would start his creative process with a prop, an open-ended question and go from there. The outcome became vignettes on the relationship to clothing.

Sally E. Dean a performing artist and choreographer talks about the integration of somatic and costume¹. It is included in the choreographic process in the way that it uses costuming to develop somatic movement education.

Jessica Bugg discusses the relationship between fashion and performance art as a choreographic and scenography tool. Jessica also wrote an article called *Emotional and Memory* where she investigates using the clothed body as a site-specific performance allowing the costume design to drive the emotion and physicality demands of the story².

In an interview, *The Spirit of Potentials*, Bretta Gerecke of Catalyst Theatre inspires the creative process of costume in the collaborative performance and she shares how this journey is beneficial for the character, designer and director in deepening the meaning of the work.

In the article, *For Show Only-No performers*, designers Smith and Smith demonstrate their design process of transporting site-specific projects remounted in a museum setting and the trials of preserving the meanings of the work in such a space.

Pamela Howard’s *What is Scenography?* Examines the performance space and considers what is important in the space to deepen the meaning of the performance. She observes how costume can create a scenic space.

¹ Dean, Sally. *Somatic movement and costume research*. Sallyedean.com. 2013.p1

² Bugg, Jessica. *The clothed body and performance art*. Museum of applied Arts journal. 2011.p65

² Bugg, Jessica. *The clothed body and performance art*. Museum of applied Arts journal. 2011.p65

Representation and Black Womanhood: The Legacy of Sarah Baartman is a book that not only is a discussion by a collection of writers, but also a tribute to the empowerment of women through the inspiration of the legacy of Sarah Baartman was an exotic African woman in early 1800s Europe who became a circus performer. The book discusses how women of colour saw themselves and how others viewed them in society. It celebrates Sarah and her experience as a gift or message in how to peel back the layers and demystify the objectification of women.

The use of costumes and fabric manipulation as a choreographic tool, within a choreographic process has begun to open the possibilities of creative structures, Choreography and costume design process and practice was evolved, the common element that drives both practices is the instrument of the body in space. Coming together as equal partners deepens the meaning and the framework of contemporary dance expression. Understanding the significance of what fabric can bring to space, and the kinesthetic awareness of the body, compels a potency of emotions and value in storytelling through performance. This extended essay explores three individual processes to develop a broader vocabulary to reflect on in the choreographic process as a way to develop deeper meaning.

Creative Process

Case Study 1: *Autobiographical*

The first case study of this thesis was a solo I created for the *Now h e r e* performance (Illustration1) called *Behind the Eyes of a Venus*. It featured the choreography of the MFA student autobiographical solos, presented October 24-26 2013 at the Mclean Performance Studio at York University marked the opening of my research in the area of manipulating fabric and beads to create movement vocabulary in telling the story of Sarah Baartman. The choreography tells the story of Sarah or Saartjie Baartman from Cape town, South Africa who was persuaded by an English Doctor to travel to England and Paris to make money from the abnormal features of her body. In the book, *Sarah Baartman and the Hottentot Venus: A Ghost story* The author described Sarah as “An extraordinary object of nature existing at the edge of the exotic and the grotesque, a freak, a monster, an animal”³. After being forced into prostitution, she died and her body’s abnormalities were cut off and displayed in a Paris Museum until 1985. The requests by the South African government for her remains to be returned were denied for many years. They were finally released in 2002 and laid to rest in her hometown. The costume creation process used to create this choreography focuses on the contrasts between the environment of her upbringing and her exposure as a commodity in Europe.

In this extended essay, the question investigated is: How are choreographic movements influenced by the use of fabric manipulation? I began my process by recording myself moving in space with different types of music from instrumental drums to strings as I improvised to conjure the essence of Sarah’s colourful past. When I visited the village in the Volta region of Ghana, one of my guides talked about how the kids in the village wear minimal clothing until they reach the age of puberty or start school. “Rites of passage or life cycle”⁴ rituals, known as *Dipo*, are rituals to prepare young girls for womanhood within the Eastern region of Ghana. These rituals are also performed for the young men but the focus of this research is on female rituals.

Dipo is used as a function for the girls’ bodies to be adorned by the elderly African women of the village. In rites of passage beads are used to canvas their bodies. Also, body adornments are used to denote identity, religion, and history. The influence of the beads and

³ Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus: A ghost story and a Biography*, (Princeton University Press and oxford), p.80.

⁴ Marijke Steergstra, *Dipo and the Politics of culture in Ghana*, Woeli Publishing Services.2005, p.1.Print

beadwork I used in this case study was inspired by my trip to Ghana and the drawings of Sarah Baartman (Illustration 2a, 2b). In the drawings, Sarah is represented showing off the wears of the Khoisan tribe, dressed in beads from head to toe and wearing embroidery apron coverings. Her clothing appears to take inspiration from the Dipo Rites found in Ghana.

Photographs of women, in Africa adorned with beads, are often a sign of beauty, vitality, confidence and empowerment. During puberty rites, waist beads, made by the elderly women of the village, represent the personality of the girls through color, and pattern. The patterns are indicative of the tribe one belongs to. Also, the patterned beads are worn to measure the stomach of a woman during pregnancy and are laid to rest with the wearer. In my creative process I found vintage beaded belts to decorate the body. In this case study these vintage beaded belts were constructed of wood beads of different shapes and sizes, which is important in the puberty rights as the size of beads expresses vitality and marital fertility. In *Beads and Beadwork* by Duncan Clarke, Clarke explains the importance of color and beads and how they are used to signify the levels of importance in the status system. For example, corals, metals, and bronze were considered highly prized and worn by the kings in West Africa, Benin. Zulu women sent messages to their boyfriends via neckbands, bracelets and necklaces as they signified marital status, place of origin and political alliances.

The creative intention is to ritualistically create the process in which one begins to identify oneself. Beaded belts in very rich colors of gold, green, yellow and metals were used as elaborate waist belts inspired by Dipo-puberty rights. The Cowrie shells or *Cedis* were used as a type of currency in Ghana. I included these shells in the belt and neck ornaments to bring more value to the costume meaning in the solo I danced were found in Africa (Illustration 3).

The fabric used in this case study was a part of a collection of fabric I collected years ago. I have been using it as a practice apron. The fabric represented an exaggerated replica of a covering, which would have been worn as an apron by women in some parts of Africa. During my creative practice, the apron became a very effective tool in my choreographic process as it expanded to represent the story of Sarah's journey. Not only was the fabric a costume but became partner in this dance. In moments where I was grappling with the fabric it became a conversation. The folding of the fabric became a ritual, the pulling of it became a birth, and the gentle throwing became a release of something no longer needed. As I walked away at the end the fabric tangled and detangled around my legs without hindering my journey into the light.

The colors of the costumes in the film *The life and times of Sara Baartman: The Hottentot Venus* was the motivation to the transition of moods, and emotions of her character. A neutral colour of brown, and beige, with tattered fabric textures like ropes and dull metal chains, was used to present Sarah as an animal in a cage. As she travelled from England to Paris her exoticism of her act flourished. Her performance became a little more polished, and the color of the costumes become bright, bold reds and gold's similar to the color expressed as Benin royalty. The color of the costume transitions to one of mystery, and forbidden, eroticism, as Sarah's performance was now viewed as a fetish to the audience, draped in black fabric, with leather and metals, Sarah was looked at as an objectified woman by the audience. In the film, the final years of her life depicted dull and tattered color were used, to depict her role as a prostitute until she died.

In my solo I used the bold, bright color of the red cloth used as an extended apron. The bright color of gold, red, green, yellow, worn in the beaded waist belt and the elaborate wooden body jewelry in my dance, depicted the height of Sarah's presence in the film were she was in Paris, dressed in the colours of African royalty.

I wanted to represent this stature of empowerment in the portrait of Sarah, even at a time when her shape was depicted as abnormal in society. As I worked on this solo I got an opportunity to volunteer my time at African Fashion Week Toronto. When assisting designers like Beni Boo Styles from Toronto and Black Trash from Botswana, I was intrigued by how the designers had their own expectations of body types they would be used for their featured clothing line (Illustration 4a,b). A comment of needing models with more of an hourglass shape was requested, which then reinforced the values of the African body image I experienced in my readings and in my research trip.

My time in Africa allowed me to embrace the sensibilities, such as the postures and gestures of the women and men of Ghana, West Africa. I allowed myself to observe the shape and movement of the body gestures of the village. I saw the women's movement as earth-bound rooted in the hips, with strong backs for lifting and carrying. These gestures were revealed in the city and it remains the dominant posture in the influential western social establishment.

I observed the children and adults in Ghana in a powerful squat position within their day to day living it gave a sense of rooted strength and support, as the upper body articulate

movements of the task at hand.

My task of folding the fabric was a creative way to go deeper into the storytelling. As the voice of the singer mourns her loss, I was inspired to ritualistically manipulate the extended fabric slowly and meticulously, to convey the yearning in her voice. The shaking of my hips in a wide second, the arch of my back, and the body undulations and articulations was inspired by the spirit of Sarah Baartmen in the film.

In an interview I did with (recording) Nii Yartey, the Artistic Director of the Dance Department of Ghana University and former Director of the National Dance Company of Ghana, Nii talks about how the *“perpetual movement of life is embedded in the values of the African people, and how it is rooted in the value of the people”*⁵. His words have influenced my approach in my creative process by allowing me to lead with the rooted value systems of my African lineage. I had been drawn to the Adinkra symbol system, a system designed by the Akan tribe as proverbs that retain historical events of Africa for inspiration. Sankofa was a symbol that inspired me throughout my creative process of Sarah (Illustration 5). Sankofa means: “Return and take it.” To elaborate, “return and take it” means that you take from your past as you better the future.

The symbol design used was a road map for the movements created. A floor map was created as I physically moved from one end of the room to another creating the journey of the Sankofa meaning. In the studio, I played with the idea of journey by moving from up stage to down stage on a diagonal to show depth and journey. The Sankofa symbol was always present and I would shift forward into space as I had a glimpse of what was left behind. Sometimes moving backwards to where I have come, to begin the journey again. The details of the long apron was to show, choreographically, the functionality of the fabric as I told stories of my journey showing the versatility and manipulation of the cloth to show a time of mourning, regality, play, loss, and surrender.

⁵ Yartey, Nii. Personal interview. June 2013.recording

The music I edited for this solo was inspired by the layering textures of the talking drum, rhythmic shells and Dobet Gnahore's Loubou (mourning). I was inspired to compose this score in relation to the important elements I wanted to present in the piece. For example, the African elements of call and response were used to create movement in response, and the call in silence to be used to impact the homage of the beading ritual. The mourning song by Dobet Gnahore helped to manipulate the tapestry of stories being told in the folding and unfolding of the cloth.

Manipulating fabric textiles to create movement vocabulary and support movement meaning was the base of my exploration in developing *Behind the eyes of Venus*. This process challenged me to be in the studio moving through space with an apron, images of Sarah and music, to develop and create different ways of initiating the movement of the cloth I created moments of stillness to allow the cloth to be the scenography of the piece. Repetition and tempo became a metaphor for ritual, and the use of the stage space in a diagonal fashion created a sense of the Sankofa meaning that relates to the journey of empowerment inspired by Sarah's legacy.

Case Study 2 –*Self produced*

Anansi, a mythical creature from traditional West African and Caribbean storytelling, inspired my work called *Threads of Gossamer* (Illustration 6) featured as my self-produced work at the Port Credit Emporium November 15-17, 2013. I found this quote, walking through the textiles museum, which featured the art of storytelling through fabric art and quilting.

*“The Art of Storytelling extends beyond the written word it encompass a myriad of forms”*⁶. Storytelling incorporates dance drama and music, which are integral elements of African performance, *The Arts in traditional society*⁷. The oral stories of the mythical creature Anansi stories are about a half-man/ half spider and his cunning and tricky ways. It is usually told by elders and is embedded in African performance of dance, drama and music. This was the inspiration to create a production that combines these elements in the context of a site-specific performance.

The intention of *Threads of Gossamer* was to ask the question of how to create costuming to support the movement’s meaning, to bring together the essence of the African performance experience, within an atmospheric performance space. Also, celebrate the origin and meaning of the fabrics, the textures and hairstyle of Africa, lastly to collaborate with a local artist in the community.

I was inspired to step away from traditional staging, by setting the performance at the Port Credit Emporium Art Gallery and gift store. The store had unique elements such as the main floor, stairs that leads to second, and third floor. I made use of the whole store to create my three day self-produced work *Threads of Gossamer*.

Inspired by the storytelling tale of Anansi, I incorporated the opening scene of my performance, with a grandmother sitting on the edge of the stairs combing her granddaughters hair as she tells the story of how Anansi lost his hair, and why it is important to take care of your hair. The opening of this scene set the intimacy of the space and invited the audience to engage.

My travels to Africa inspired me to research Anansi, and the art of storytelling. I found many stories of how this mythical Spiderman came to be, as told by my guild in the Volta region of Ghana, West Africa. The stories would include the elements of music and dance in a seated circular formation, as the storyteller dramatically re-enact his version of Anansi’s adventures.

⁶ Shaughnessy, Roxane. *“Telling Stories”*. Toronto: Textiles museum of Canada. Sept.25, 2013

⁷ Nketia, Kwabena. *Ghana-Music, dance and drama: A Review of the Performing Arts of Ghana*. Ghana publishing corporation.1965.print

The Anansi tales had a combination of the African history values and traditions as a scenic backdrop to the cunning trickery of Anansi's adventures, and the lessons to learned about moral. When I was visiting the National Museum of Ghana in the city, the closest I came to the story was shown in woodcarvings of footstools of royalty within the Akon tribe. The stools were finely detailed with symbols and identification of the ones who own them of hierarchal stature. The stool of the spider design was said to be used by the right hands strategist of the King. Which informed me that Anansi's character was of importance and value to African culture.

It was important for me to investigate the use of an inspirational space not only for the dancer but I was creating this for the audience to participate as viewers. The stairs, which lead to the glassed enclosed second floor, conjured mystery and suspense as the story began with the storyteller setting the focus of attention for the audience, while the dancer slowly rolled in creative ways to descend down the stairs, showing hints of her presence along the journey. The walk way revealed the character relationships to her surroundings that were viewed by the audience in a very intimate setting, also giving the spoken word artist a scenic platform to perform⁸.

The set design of the floor was layered with plastic and rolls of burlap, and then covered with mulch, leaves, trees, and vines that were donated from *Arms Art* in Mississauga. The neighborhood created an arch above the stairs. Burlap was used to decorate as draping and to cover the bottoms of the trees, which were buried under the leaves and mulch (Illustration 7a and 7b).

The textures used for *Threads of Gossamer* influence the scenography and drive the deep meaning behind choreography and costuming for this piece. Gossamer is a very light, sheer, gauze-like fabric. It was used in the piece to represent threads that were closely intertwined in some areas but loose and billowy with loose string below that Anansi pulls from to find connection.

The use of burlap was used throughout the production in the building of the set design and also combined with leather to create the costume. As a costume, I focused on the natural drape of the burlap to capture the fluidity of the textile, and the stiffness and durability of the burlap. There is an organic innocence to this natural fiber that intrigued me as I continued my research.

⁸ Kloetzel, Melanie, Pavlik, Carolyn. *Site dance: choreographers and the lure of alternative spaces*. University press of Florida.2009.p41

As known as hessian or Jute, Burlap is made by the fibers of the vegetable plant jute. It is known for its origin in India it was discovered by an English trader in the late 1700's. It was used in India to make rope and paper. Scotland discovered how to spin the tough material into yarn. Burlap is used for making sacks for coffee, concrete, and cement, sand bags to build embankments, to ward off floodwaters. Burlap also provides durable canvas for painting, and it can be woven into yarn or twine, shade cloth for protection of plants, used for furniture, grocery bags, curtains, footwear, and clothing.

Burlap is strong, versatile, resistant, hard to tear, resilient and environmentally friendly. However, images of the fabric transpose a different meaning of how the fabric was used. For example, during African American slavery the separation of slaves kept the in-home servants well dressed and the field servants were given less comfortable fabric to wear. Children are identified in sacks similar to burlap and pictorials from the past demonstrate that those who were lynched wore burlap. Recently, I viewed a 30-minute performance on *Vimeo* by choreographer, Michel Kouakou/Daara, from the Ivory Coast (who now resides in New York City). As titled, "Sack" *"Swaying much like a burlap sack looms, Kouakou serves as a metaphoric vessel for what weighs in the balance between what is visible and what is not"*⁹. The exposed sack is tied up and sways slowly. Seeing the burlap sack automatically refers to the other usage of the fabric relating to the reference of lynching, oppression, bondage, slavery, tattered clothing.

An African American model wearing a designer sack dress made from burlap purposely embroidered with strings and ties to give an earthier and almost tattered, laid back look. It is presented with the caption *"Nothing says 'tribal' like rouché burlap sack jumper dress!"*¹⁰

By Wendi Muse from the blog *Racialicious- The intersection of Race and Popular culture* article: *Fashion and Patronizing, Colonial Rhetoric, Take*. These examples show the opposite characteristics of the strength, resilience and versatility this natural fiber is known for in the context of African history.

The rope used was also filled with different meanings but I chose to connect the rope to lineage and history through the art of storytelling and also to the lineage we carried about hair. The rope and the vines are shown as intertwined, long and some hidden to represent the known, the unknown that is faced in the challenges of black hair. As mentioned in the poem *Twist tied*

⁹ <http://blog.calarts.edu/2011/09/21/week-three-of-now-fest-zoophilic-follies-sack-and-victoria-marks/-review>.

¹⁰ Muse, Wendy. *Fashion and Patronizing Colonial Rhetoric Take*. *Racialicious*. Blog. 2009.

and tucked performed by spoken word artist Imani James who performed this piece in my closing matinee performance, “*each thread woven to hold, the history of hair*”¹¹.

I decided to create movement that portrays the innocence of this natural fiber allowing the dancer to embody the innocence and ease the fabric has to offer.

When creating on the stairs, the costume became a sculptural dance as the dancer focused on executing every hand and leg positioning as she was slowly rolling down the stairs with the costume. Every pause, every quick movement, every reach with the leg and arms allowed the costume to surrender to the movements or support the many textures that were involved in the suit. Once Anansi found herself on the narrow path I allowed the costume to be a whimsical simulation to the forest as the attention to the dancer was more of a mystical creature yet, human which is how I incorporated the myth of half human/half spider. The gestures of the dancers journey were of wonderment of this new world, and curiosity of self. The dance with the rope/vines signifies the grappling of the new world but a suspension of support of the past.

The sets of color were bright with the burnt orange, browns and reds collide with each other when the dancer rolls and summersaults and finds stillness in the leaves, giving the audience a moment to visually take in the full design of all elements combined.

In reference to the *Nigerian Body Adornment* book on the chapter of hairdressing, it stresses the importance of the head being¹² “The seat of Power” Listening to the voices of women in the today’s hair salon or as a hairstylist at the African fashion week Toronto 2013 and within references of Imani’s poem, and lastly from the Chris Rock documentary *Good Hair* featuring Chris Rock- (2009) I found models obsessively apologetic about their hair and continuing to strive for the ideas of our sisters of other races.

The abstract images of Anansi The African mythical creature physical features is a half Spider and half man with dreadlocks (Dreadlock are matted coils of hair) But a another image that was inspiration for me, and encouraged me to open the dialogue of black hair was the short film- KWAKU ANANSE (2013) by: Akosua Adoma Owusu. The main character here was sporting a very natural Afro and with that I continued to explore different hairstyle and celebrate

¹¹ James, I mani. *Twist tied and tucked*. November 17, 2013. Print

¹² Negri, de Eve. *Nigerian body Adornment*. Nigeria magazine. 1976. p15. Print

it.

Body Adornment through hair styling was important to convey the characteristic of the character. In *Threads of Gossamer*, I focused on embracing hair in its natural state inspired by the Body Adornment book by understanding the meaning of hairstyles and the power it carries.

My main character was given Bantu knots, also called Zulu knots, this where the hair that is sectioned sometimes in a design and coiled into a knot (Illustration 8a,b). With the addition of leaves and a spider headpiece, it was attached at the border of the hairline, in addition to the Bantu knots.

The fashion show opening night of *Threads of Gossamer* featured models as forest nymphs with hairstyles taken from images that combined the images of natural hairstyles and nymph-like images combined - celebrating the power of natural hair.

Alfonse Ahumani, a member of the National dance company of Ghana, created the music. He decided to play around in a studio with instruments used in performance that extends beyond the usual sounds of the Djembe, sounds inspired by our conversation of my Anansi project. I then overlaid his music with sounds of the forest using morning electronic sounds for drama and suspense for Anansi's journey and the forest at dusk with frogs croaking at the very end. The music, with the space, set the scene for the dancer and allowed me to create the pauses needed for the audience to visually take in the moments of the dance.

The lighting design company *Divide by Zero* is a local designer in the Mississauga area that was also inspired by the dance installation and we talked a lot about the premise of the project. The query in the creative process was to have an overall setting of the space, which would involve the audience, or do we just light the piece. I chose to light the space to allow the audience to experience the mystery and emotion of the piece.

I was introduced to a number of wonderful artists through the Port Credit Emporium. One in particular was the designer of my poster and flyer, a visual artist by the name of Bev Tang Kong. I had a meeting with Bev in the Port Credit space to talk about my choreographic concept and she was intrigued by the concept of Anansi being shown in this manner and space. Her process was very similar to mine as a visual artist. She spent time walking through the space as we talked about color and graphic images I wanted to play with. Our collaboration consists of two meetings in the space and then on-line as she creates an image, then review, then makes changes.

The Venders night consist of the presenting the *Threads of Gossamer* then the store was open to a “*Venders Night*” that consist of shopping and browsing the Art instillation on the second floor by Natalia Norton and friend Malcolm, who entertained the audience with a two-hour painting instillation journey. I collaborated with spoken word artist (that closed the three-day show) Imani James on images and idea of *Threads of Gossamer* that she and I both wanted to convey. *Twist tied and tucked* was created and performed as she walks through of the forest space. Her words resonated with the show and encapsulate the process in creating it.

The art of storytelling helped me to create a version of Anansi that continued to instill the values of African identity, within the forms of music dance and drama. *Threads of Gossamer* allowed me to work on the choreographic process of how to create costuming to support the movement’s meaning, to bring together the influence of the African performance, within an atmospheric performance space. I enjoyed the sense of community throughout this project as it gave *Threads of Gossamer* a voice to storytelling, community involvement, and support of the arts in Port Credit community.

Case Study 3-*Solo/Souls Deep*

I used the painting *The Sugar Shack* (1971) by visual artist Ernie Barnes to create my final proscenium stage production *Solo/Souls Deep*, presented in *Body of Minds* featuring the MFA choreographic research presentation February 13 and 14, 2014 (Illustration 9) at the Sandra Faire and Ivan Fecan Theatre. *The Sugar Shack* as the inspiration for my final production allowed me to continue to explore the choreographic question of how to create costuming that supports the movement's meaning, and to look at how costuming brings out the physicality of the dancer's character. *Solo/Souls Deep* focuses on a vignette of one character's journey to spiritual enlightenment amongst a cast of four women who play the scenographic backdrop to the piece. This study will go through the creative process of researching character development, costume renderings, in developing answers to my choreographic process.

The Sugar Shack is a famously known painting that appeared in the sitcom *Good Times* and Marvin Gaye's album cover *I Want You* (1976) (Illustration 10). The connection of the visual painting and the artistic movement expressed in the painting is the Chitlin circuit¹³, which was a circuit for musician throughout the rural areas of the North and South Carolinas. Similar to Vaudeville, The Chitlin circuit featured music of grass roots rhythm and Blues artist such as Joe Turner, T-Bone Walker, Wynonie Harris, Roy Brown to Rock and Roll legends such as James Brown, Little Richard, Ike Turner, BB King, Ray Charles, Aretha Franklin, Etta James and Ella Fitzgerald to name a few.

Today they are known as legends in their field. The 1950s were famously known for the Civil rights movement, and leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, Jesse Jackson, and Malcolm X were among the many men and women blazing the trails for the civil rights movement. At this time the movement style was the swing era and the music was shifting the grassroots of the Blues into the birth of a new Rock and Roll sound and the correlation of these historical elements are felt in the visual painting and the artistic movement captured in the essence of the painting. In a 2008 interview Ernie Barnes mentioned the emotion behind the portrait as "To show that African Americans utilize rhythm as a way of resolving physical

¹³ Bailey, Michael. Preston Lauterbach: The Chitlin' circuit and the road to Rock and roll. All about Jazz.com. 2012. Electronic

Tension”¹⁴.

My first viewing of this painting had both a visual and spiritual impact on me. I saw a connection between the *Sugar Shack* portrait and its association to the Baptist church. The painting depicted the call and response of the music of that time, church band members moonlighting, and the vivid light source to juxtapose a spiritual enlightenment. The movement I saw in the painting gave me a sense of deep surrendering to the rhythm and a letting go of inhibitions. My research will include the development of movement inspired by the painting. I will create from this painting the multi-layering of textures, angles/twists, levels, shades, light and dark and the rich and muted colours to create the sense of historical vintage feel. I will delve into the curvatures and body angles depicted in a style called neo-mannerist.

Neo –Mannerism as described by Art critic Frank Getlein is the use of serpentine lines, elongation of the human figure, clarity of line, unusual spatial relationships, painted frames, and distinctive color palettes”¹⁵. All of these elements are inherent in the paintings of Ernie Barnes.

To understand the overall intention of the set design and choreographic intent my research of the *Sugar Shack* painting, took me to the history that circled the underground music scene in the South. Similarities in the painting to many urban musical genres at their grassroots level distinct from the mainstream. You can see the close knit crowd the dancers portraying a release of physical tension, soulful clapping, stomping and testifying. These characteristics of gestures are a strong link to the Baptist church that was embedded in the Chitlin circuit. Further research in the music of the Chitlins circuit led me to understand that the roots of the Blues created what is known today as rhythm and blues or rock and roll. In the article Rock and Theology the author talks about the use of ¹⁶*Jazzed up gospel* started by Roy Brown a native of the church and a known bandleader of the underground circuit. This genre began to combine loud vocals, the shout and response, hand clapping that is found in the churches. This is all visible in the sugar shack

¹⁴ <http://erniebarnes.com/biography.html>

¹⁵ Getlein, Frank. *A Critical Perspective on the Art of Ernie Barnes*. Press room. 1989

¹⁶ McDonough, Mary. The dawn of Rock N’ Roll: chitin’s and Gospel Roots. Rock and Theology, general Reviews. 2012

painting.

The design intention of my dance was to focus around the spiritual aspects of the picture, as the dancers evoke gestures of a revival, within a single light that beams above the bodies. I wanted to represent a spiritual awakening that happened, in the center of both, the secular and the club world. To dynamically catch this spirit I decided to portray both worlds by creating the secular church, up stage right to show a type of hierarchy of spirituality, created by rows of chairs spaced specifically for dancers to walk through and kneeling to pray. On the far down stage left I put a single chair representing the lower in standards and immoral. The center the portal of light signified the spiritual cypher. The uses of this light both these worlds. The dancers moved with gestures of modest, demure or heedless and recklessness. The movement dialogue of the dancers became significant when the main character moved in and out of both the central light exposing worlds and the discourse between her spiritual journey and inner torment.

To develop the physicality of the dancer's character, I created a mock story of my characters life, keeping in mind the music, culture, fashion, and civil right movement era. I include the character going through unexpected and dramatic changes, analyze the incarnations of the main character and design two costumes looks that represents those changes, I collected images of body types and movements, and create two renderings- "before and after looks". This inspired the momentum to *Solo/Souls Deep*. I used Nina Simone song "*Four Women*" to inspire my dancer to choose the character they identified with. "*Four women*" tells the personal stories of each woman and their journey. The main dancer identified with Sweet Thing and our character story began. The words of the song give her further inspiration in movement development.

"My skin is tan my hair is fine
My hips invite you my mouth like wine
Whose little girl am I?
Anyone who has money to buy
What do they call me?
My name is Sweet Thing
My name is Sweet Thing"¹⁷

¹⁷ Simone, Nina. "*Four Women*". Verve Jazz Masters 17. The Verve music group.1994

Another character introduced in this portrait was a drunken lounge singer AKA Shug inspired by Shug Avery from the movie *The Color Purple* (1985)¹⁸. This character represented the experience personality of the club world. The church ladies also had roles in representing the morality of the church with characters yet to be developed for future production.

I referenced to the *Sugar Shack* portrait to look at how I wanted the costume to move, the color I wanted to use, and the type of fabric that would be suitable to execute these movements. I had my dancers practice in a lycra dress as we looked at how the body is formed in the dress during movement and stillness in relation to the dancers in the portrait and to compliment the character of Sweet Thing (Illustration 11), and I also had my dancers moved without the dress to develop the integrity of the movements as if the costume was being worn, this in turn developed the physicality and stamina of the dancers which may easily be hidden behind the fabric as a blur of movement.

Throughout the choreographic process, elements of construction of the costume were considered and tested on the dancers for example the width of the skirt for battements and deep second positions, the length of skirt for volume and dynamics, of movement in space, length of the yoke (band of fabric that wraps around the hips) to give shape to the dancers and freedom of movement. The church ladies wore uniformed costumes with a hint of individuality in the length of dresses and positioning of the fascinators, one being the drunken lounge singer who wore a gold beaded hat over her fascinator as she transitioned from club to church.

The color red in Solo/SoulsDeep was used for the main characters costume. The colour assisted in developing her character. It took on the meaning of red as seen in western culture as “signifying the personalities of joy, strength, sexuality, radiance, determination, energetic, exciting, intense”¹⁹ the woman in the painting and the character of Sweet Thing along with the descriptive red words helped in the instruction of how the dancer should move in space in bring her character to life. I kept the color of the church ladies dresses about two shades lighter or a deeper coral, which evoked a sense of demure innocence complimenting the deep, red.

¹⁸ Colour Purple. Steven Spielberg. Perf. Whoopi Goldberg, Danny Glover, Margaret Avery, Oprah Winfrey, Adolph Caesar, Ray Dawn Chong. Warner Bros.pictures.1985.film

¹⁹ Bourn, Jennifer. Color Meaning: Meaning of the color red. Bourn creative.2011. electronic

The music score was arranged in order to inflect the mood of the portrait with all its historical nuances of the time period. The use of recorded scratching, as the opening sound was reminiscent of an old fashion recording, to set the historical era of the piece. The score represented historic styles of music that played within a current progressive abstract soundscapes, fusing the hints of gospel, transitional, and spiritual music to compliment the journey of the story.

The elements expressed in Art critic Frank Getlein statement based on Ernie Barnes signature style of painting, goes deep into roots of African –American culture, through the spark of emotions of an era, and embodies soulful movement within his paintings.

Ernie Barnes *Sugar Shack* painting inspired me to fully express the curvatures, angles/ twists, and color for my set and costume design production of *Solo/SoulsDeep*. To investigate how costuming brings out the physicality of the dancer's character and by developing a character through researching the artistic style of the *Sugar Shack* painting, through the history presented in portrait, images, color, story development, and music, to create costuming that support the movement's meaning of the portrait, and to created this work for the proscenium stage.

Outcomes

Always reminding myself of the question of how can costuming support and deepen the contemporary choreographic voice and, how might fabric manipulations take a central role in the creative process. Helps me to keep the integrity of my research in line with my choreographic process in studio and outcome on stage.

What goes forward from this research is my increased knowledge and ability to work with types of textiles, recycled materials in costume and set design to create meaningful work. As I continue my development and deepen the support of my contemporary movement voice. I will continue to explore fabric manipulation to support meaning and expression in performance. I will find collaborators in performance artists, fashion and set designers of likeminded sensibilities.

In every case study I have been inspired to continue the journey of each story. As the case studies are just hints of what is to come, each case has opened different avenues of interest in my choreographic development. *Behind the eyes of a Venus* I will be continuing to work with the cloth in larger amounts as it becomes more of the scenography of the work and my challenge would be to develop my movement vocabulary with the excessive amount, making use of developing the physicality of the dancer's character.

In *Threads of Gossamer* I will be exploring the art of short dance films in telling the story of Anansi stories incorporating other types of textiles in open scenic spaces, I would also like to remount this *Threads of Gossamer* in a forest combined with a clothing line that appears in the movie.

Solo/Souls Deep leads me to take on other character stories of enlightenment as I continue to create a full-length ballet of *The Sugar Shack* bringing other performance art forms into the process. I will also explore my original idea of creating an installation portrait with the use of 10 dancers, a large frame, body paint and lighting in a gallery.

I learned something about myself in every case study production. The most challenging *Behind The eyes of a Venus*- solo, I spent a lot of time in the studio finding ways of moving inside out, developing movement with the use of images and music, recording, and reviewing for many ideas. I eventually realized a creative habit or routine is important in my creative process. My process included working with a variety of music, in intimate studio spaces, and my laptop to recording. The connection of fabric manipulation allowed me to work with the physicality of the

cloth. When working on dancers I enjoy warming up as a group and exploring/creating movement as a group and usually the solos were developed from what I saw in the space.

I was invited to create a 90-minute workshop for the 3-year choreography class at York University January 16th, 2014²⁰. This was an opportunity to talking about my process and using examples of my process to create a choreographic dialogue between me and the students, about how to use fabric textures, article of clothing, or an already constructed costume; can create choreographic movement vocabulary. I incorporated my processes from my case studies and my research on types of process to create an improvised movement class based on my research. The results of this workshop had me constantly queuing the dancers to move away from movement patterns they already know and try to find ways of approaching the fabric, the prop or costume. The importance of themes and one-word ideas helped the students to go deeper into their own investigation. I found props or articles of clothing that shifted the movement patterns of the body was easier for the dancers to create movement such as the lentil socks.

The questions that remain for me are how could I market this as a choreographic process to learn and preserve cultural identity, through the connection of movement, design, and history. How do I develop this voice to make it accessible to all cultures, Share ideas of body movement in current fashion construction and design by deepening the design process and defining the fashion market. Lastly to be apart of the Academic arena in continuing to develop meaningful works in contemporary dance.

The inquiry of my creative voice continues to helps me develop work in the context of unearthing the deep meaning, to stimulate the spiritual, and emotional context of my subjects. Also honor the sensibilities of storytelling that is embedded in all aspects of my experiences of performance art.

²⁰ Harvey, Sharon. *Choreography and Costume workshop*. York University. Toronto, Ont. 16 January 2014.

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Outcome

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Appendices

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Appendix B

Illustrations



Illustration 1



Illustration 2a



Illustration 2b



Illustration 3



Illustration 4



Illustration 5

Threads of Gossamer
A Dance & Costume Art Installation
presented by Sharon Harvey

Sharon is a dancer and choreographer who aspires to uncover stories untold, strengthen the athleticism and artistry of contemporary dance, and encourage the empowerment and presence of the female voice. This native of Toronto is currently pursuing her Masters in the choreographic process of costuming.

Threads of Gossamer brings together the elements of choreography and costuming to evoke the resilience of meaning in traditional African storytelling in the context of deepening the support of contemporary dance.

November 15 & 16, 8:00 PM
November 17, 2:00 PM

Tickets \$10.00
\$8 students/seniors/CADA

Port Credit Emporium
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Illustration 6



Illustration 7a,b

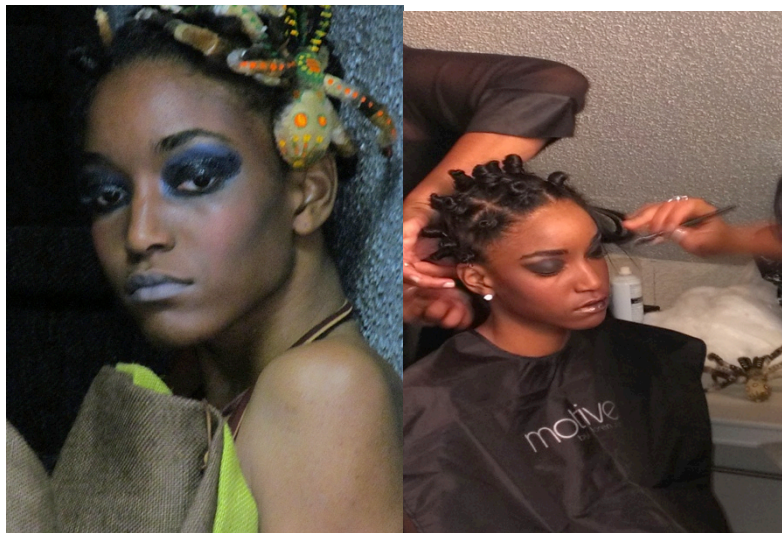
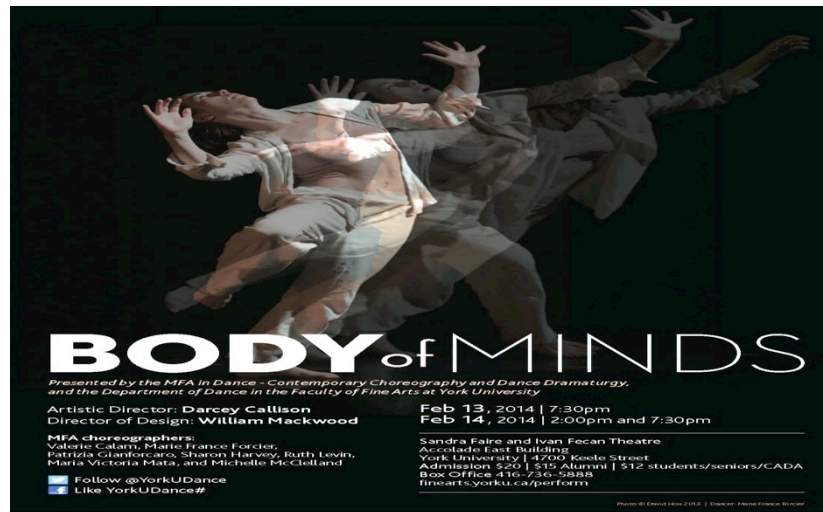


Illustration 8 a, b



dance.finearts.yorku.ca

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Illustration 9



Illustration 10



Illustration 11

Appendix C

Choreography and Costume workshop

Using textiles, as Choreographic Tools in the Creative Process and Choreographic Outcomes.

Objectives

1. To create and expand on movement vocabulary, for meaningful performance outcome.
2. To bring out the movement physicality of a dancer/character
3. To deepen the support of contemporary dance through fabric manipulation.

Outline

The use of silence/recorded music, sound-scrapes or vocals, live drumming and or Keywords or topic to trigger the movement process and are sampled throughout the class. This helps to develop the movement quality and tempo at which to experience the movement's process. The process Begins with the individual moving from the inside/out, within your personal space, Move out of circle into community space as you cultivate more vocabulary, then back to personal circle (Moving with the vocabulary cultivated outside the personal space), play with both ideas of personal and community.

- a. Personal space-investigate movement
- b. Community space- investigates moving through space
- c. Combine the both A and B in sequence of movements

With fabric

- a. Individual with fabric/prop- investigate movement
- b. Without object (As If...)-investigate movement
- c. Mix of the two-movement sequence together

With costume

- a. Individual-investigate texture, movement, colour, sound, weight, flow. Create sequence
- b. Without costume-investigate characteristics of the costume through movement. Create sequence.

- c. Mix the movements.

Lentil socks, weighted hats, lite fabrics etc....

These give the dancers a chance to create characteristics of a character by picking a prop the shifts the dancers normal movement patterns. Apply the same procedure as above to create movement.

- a. Individual with fabric/prop- investigate movement
- b. Without object (As If...)-investigate movement
- c. Mix of the two-movement sequence together

In between processes you want to show and record and share experiences of the individual student creative processes.

Appendix D

Poem

Twisted, Tied & Tucked

Twisted. Tied and tucked, ev-ry strand of hair wrapped up
Each thread woven to hold, the history of hair stories told

Of Ritual & Rights of passage
Royalty & Runaway slaves
Of religious practice or political power
Of stylish magazines & catwalk runways

Twisted. Tied and tucked, ev-ry strand of hair wrapped up
Each thread woven to hold, the history of hair stories told

Through time & space, over several centuries
This head wrap, my gele, has evolved through history
You see, I do not hide my hair in shame
Nothing can hide the pain

At first it was imposed
With full intention to intrude
Hair bound in handkerchief
To signify servitude
Of field slaves born to bear
The bitter scorn derived from their Masters fear

Twisted. Tied and tucked, ev-ry strand of hair wrapped up
Each thread woven to hold, the history of hair stories told

Of how, cloth became a helmet of confidence
Of courage
A form of defiance

Of the superior strength of sister warriors
Inciting slaves to revolt
For the North, Harriet Tubman and for the Maroons, Nanny
The spirit of Yemanjá cried out to those with legs strong enough to carry....

Run from here
For those too young or too old, too broken to shake the weight of your chains,
from now on... look your masters straight in the eyes, right into their eyes

And defy
Flee from captivity
Flee to be free

Twisted. Tied and tucked, ev-ry strand of hair wrapped up
Each thread woven to hold, the history of hair stories told

Oh, how they tried & tried to belittle me.
But NO FORM OF OPPRESSION
CAN BREAK ME
NO
Rags became my protection
Threads of kente makes my tribe known,
Cloth of communal identity
The gift of a quilt hiding a lock of hair
A stolen mother reveals her love for me
I shall weave
the fabric of my own hair-story

Twisted. Tied and tucked, ev-ry strand of hair wrapped up
Each thread woven to hold, the history of hair stories told

T'is freedom wrapped around my head
And I will never forget what grandma said.
Her fingers wrangling its thickness into design.
A crown, high above my head to reveal long neck and bright eyes.

You are beautiful my love, my dear
There is power in your hair.
Whether it be

Kinky
cottony
coily
curly
wooly
wavy
wiry
cornrowed
twisted
straight

Dancing spirals upon my head
shall forever form a shining halo
a sacred connection to the sun.
My Locks

My Lineage

Twisted. Tied and tucked, ev-ry strand of electric, vibrant hair wrapped up.
Each thread in this fabric
a symbolic embrace
each day gathers new meaning
waiting
for the next story
to unfold

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